

VZCZCXRO7806

PP RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHDF RUEHIK RUEHLH RUEHLN RUEHLZ  
RUEHPW RUEHROV RUEHVK RUEHYG  
DE RUEHAH #1336/01 3441338  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 101338Z DEC 07  
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9850  
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 3087  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 0902  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0776  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 1352  
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1342  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 1977  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0647

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001336

SIPDIS

SIPDIS  
SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SCA/CEN AND DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN'S PROVINCIAL PEOPLE'S COUNCIL  
ELECTIONS: LOW TURNOUT, FEW CHANGES

REF: A. ASHGABAT 1274

[1](#)B. ASHGABAT 1298

[1](#)1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

[1](#)2. (SBU) SUMMARY: Amid very light turnout, Turkmenistan's citizens voted for members of their provincial people's councils December 9. The Central Election Commission provided its typical overexaggerated estimates, claiming by the end of the day that an improbable 98.58% of Turkmenistan's voters had participated in the polls. Post also heard some credible reports of voting irregularities. Hopefully, Turkmenistan's engagement and cooperation with the OSCE, UNDP and others, who are currently reviewing electoral legislation, will lead to some improvements by the Mejlis (parliamentary) elections in December 2008. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)3. (U) As reported ref a, Turkmenistan's citizens had the opportunity to vote December 9 for their new provincial-level people council representatives. Polling stations opened promptly at 8:00 am, and began blaring Turkmen music shortly thereafter to create a more festive atmosphere. Despite this incentive, voter participation at polling stations seemed very light. An FSN who voted noted that, although names were appropriately crossed off at her polling station as the voters registered, only about 30% of the names on the page had been crossed out by mid-afternoon. (COMMENT: Post experience is that voting is usually substantially higher in Ashgabat than elsewhere, since the percentage of government employees there is highest, and government organs typically order their employees to vote. If this is accurate, voting around most of the rest of the country must have been very light. END COMMENT.) By evening, the government media was quoting the Chairman of Turkmenistan's Central Election Commission, Murat Garryev, as claiming a voter turnout rate of 98.58% -- higher than for the February 2007 presidential election.

#### PRESIDENT CASTS AN EARLY VOTE

¶4. (U) One of the early voters was President Berdimuhamedov, who was filmed with his father and grandson as they cast their votes in Ashgabat's Chandybil District. This particular photo-op had clearly been carefully chosen: the three candidates running for election in that particular precinct -- a female kindergarten principal, a female math teacher and a male police lieutenant -- came from particularly diverse social, economic and professional backgrounds, demonstrating both purported gender equality and the opportunity for advancement.

#### LACK OF PRESS AND KNOWLEDGE

¶5. (SBU) Mirroring the public's more general apathy, only two of twelve polled embassy FSNs cast their votes, citing both their unawareness of what the elections were about and disbelief in the credibility of the system. (COMMENT: Their complaints of the lack of prior information on the process may be well deserved. Unlike the elections for people's councils at the village and district levels, when embassies saw campaign meetings in at least a few areas, post is unaware that any campaign meetings took place at all for this election. END COMMENT.) The profusion of high-priority news in recent days -- coverage of visits by Turkey's President Gul and Tajikistan's President Rahmon, and the opening of a UN Regional Conflict Prevention Center in Ashgabat -- also conspired to keep election coverage off the front page of newspapers. Under the election law, the voting results must be made public within five days.

#### VOTING IRREGULARITIES STILL EVIDENT

ASHGABAT 00001336 002 OF 002

¶6. (SBU) As in previous elections, there were scattered reports of some election irregularities. In one case, an FSN's father was allowed to cast votes for his entire family (this practice, linked to the family patriarch's traditional leadership role, is usually tolerated by election officials, since it ensures a higher voter turnout rate). In another case, a member of the embassy's local staff who is registered in another province was allowed to vote in her sister's precinct.

¶7. (SBU) COMMENT: Since the provincial people's councils have little real power, this election was of interest primarily as an indicator for identifying what needs to be done to improve Turkmenistan's election system. There were no indications of procedural improvement, but also the exaggerated voting totals and lack of advance information about candidates and their platforms feeds the public's cynicism about the uselessness of voting. Hopefully, Turkmenistan's engagement and cooperation with the OSCE, UNDP and others, who are currently reviewing electoral legislation, will lead to some improvements by the Mejlis (parliamentary) elections in December 2008.

CURRAN